

Incorporating a 360° Evaluation Model IOT Transform the USMC Performance Evaluation System

EWS 2005

Subject Area Manpower

"Incorporating a 360° Evaluation Model IOT Transform the USMC Performance Evaluation System"

Contemporary Issues Paper
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8 February 2005

Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
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1. REPORT DATE 08 FEB 2005		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2005 to 00-00-2005	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Incorporating a 360&#61616; Evaluation Model IOT Transform the USMC Performance Evaluation System				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) United States Marine Corps,Command and Staff College, Marine Corps Combat Development,Marine Corps University, 2076 South Street,Quantico,VA,22134-5068				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 12	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

A 360° evaluation model within the Marine Corps would be more effective than the current Performance Evaluation System because it would individual ownership of the institution. Civilian corporations, such as Weyerhaeuser¹ and Nobel Learning Solutions², and governmental agencies such as the Department of the Navy³ and the Department of Defense Education Activity have migrated to 360° evaluation models in order to obtain a comprehensive collection of information about an employee's performance. These organizations have placed high value on the feedback loop, including subordinates, to increase productivity and encourage participative management and leadership. How different would the Marine Corps' Performance Evaluation System (PES) be if all participants had an active voice in the process? What would be gained or lost if elements from a 360° evaluation model were adopted?

How does the Performance Evaluation System (PES) work?

The current PES follows a "chain of command" structure. It consists of three members: The Marine Reported On (MRO),

¹ Weyerhaeuser Company is a publicly traded company that has been in the Fortune 200 since 1956.

² Nobel Learning Solutions is a publicly traded company on the NASDAQ.

³ Mark D. Faram, "360°evals let you rate your boss," Navy Times, January 17, 2005, pp 14-16.

Reporting Senior (RS) and Reviewing Officer (RO).⁴ For example, at Expeditionary Warfare School (EWS) the student is the MRO, the Faculty Advisor (FACAD) is the RS and the Chief Instructor (CI) is the RO. Using this example, when the FACAD is the MRO, the CI is the RS, and the Director of EWS is the RO. The reporting chain shifts upward just as the chain of command does.

The initial evaluation relationship is established when the MRO and RS complete the MRO worksheet outlined in Appendix D of the PES.⁵ Chapter 2 of the PES prescribes appropriate reporting periods, at which time the RS must complete the Fitness Report, counsel the MRO, and forward the document to the RO for action within thirty days after the conclusion of the reporting period.⁶ In the aforementioned example, the CI of EWS will be the RO for approximately 190 fitness reports. Command practices suggest that the RS to submit "recommended" Section I comments to assist the RO in delineating Marines that the RO does not observe on a regular basis. The RO derives two things from the submitted fitness reports. Firstly, it gives the RO a sample of the quality of evaluation provided by the RS in terms of written communication. The RO has the opportunity to review the RS'

⁴ U.S. Marine Corps, MCO P1610.7E With Erratum and Ch 1-9, Performance Evaluation System (Short Title PES) (Washington: Headquarters 1998), 2-3.

⁵ U.S. Marine Corps, MCO P1610.7E PES, D-1.

⁶ U.S. Marine Corps, MCO P1610.7E PES, 1-6.

work and base future Section H1 marks.⁷ Secondly, the RO is made aware of the RS' evaluation of the MRO. Under this system, the MRO does not have a formal means of communication with the RO. Unless the Fitness Report is adverse, the MRO must accept the ranking and comments submitted to the RO.

What happens when the span of influence of the RS and RO are expanded at the Battalion and Regimental level? The RO becomes more reliant on the RS for feedback that influences the RO's remarks because he/she is removed, usually by geography, from the MROs. How can the Regimental Commander know the potential and character of a company commander? Unless the company commander has distinguished himself in a unique way that gains the Regimental Commander's attention, the word of the Battalion Commander is the only feedback the Regimental Commander has as the basis of his judgment. This is significant since the RO's remarks are weighted more heavily than the RS' in the promotion process. In the current situation, the Marine with the least personal knowledge has the most influence on the promotion process. Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Gillespie wrote

⁷ U.S. Marine Corps, MCO P1610.7E PES, B-4.

extensively on this topic in his Marine Corps Gazette article in 2002.⁸ His article fully reinforces the problem outlined above.

What happens if a Battalion Commander is using his position inappropriately to influence matters within the battalion? The likelihood of the company commander speaking out is low.

Request mast⁹, though available, is not viable or realistic for contentious situations that are short of criminal, but still detrimental to good order and discipline. How different would the situation be if the MRO had the ability to participate in the PES forum by providing feedback on his/her RS to RO? If the feedback medium had consistent criteria and was mandatory, the aforementioned "contentious situation" may not have arisen! The RS would be more cognizant of his/her actions and how they may be evaluated by the MRO during his/her next reporting period. If the RS is willing to use undo command influence or create an environment that is not conducive to good order and discipline, but short of criminal, that he/she deserves to be harshly evaluated by their subordinates, thus reducing the likelihood of the RS' future promotion. Using the 360° evaluation model would

⁸ Thomas C. Gillespie, Let's Stop Ghostwriting Reviewing Officer Remarks (Quantico: Marine Corps Gazette, 2002), 29-30.

⁹ U.S. Marine Corps, MCO 1700.23E Ch 1, Request Mast (Washington: Headquarters 1997).

further cull the pack of competitors for the next selection board.

What is a 360° Evaluation Model?

A 360° Evaluation Model is an evaluation method that takes into account the feedback from all parties who have interest in the enterprise.^{10 11} It evaluates current performance and predicts future potential. Using the Marine Corps' PES model, the relevant participants are the MRO, RS, RO and the subordinates of the MRO.¹² Research shows that employees who are participative in the management of their companies are more productive and have fewer disciplinary problems than those who do not participate.¹³ Major Rick Goddard, USMC (Ret) is a General Manager of a Weyerhaeuser box plant in Exeter,

¹⁰ K. Kein. Searching 360 Degree For Employee Evaluation (Unknown: Incentive, 1996), Vol. 170, No. 10, Oct 40-42.

¹¹ B. Brewer. Performance Appraisal Issues in Hong Kong Civil Services (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Public Administration, 1994) Vol. 3, No. 3, 209-219.

¹² In this situation only Marines who are included in the Marine Corps' PES would be eligible to participate. Meaning that a subordinate would be defined as a Marine/Sailor/Civilian who has their fitness report written by the MRO. For example: If the Platoon Commander is the MRO, all of the Sergeants and above who receive a fitness report from the Platoon Commander would participate. If the Platoon Sergeant were being evaluated, the subordinates would not have any input because they are not in the reporting chain of the Platoon Sergeant.

¹³ Carl M. Franklin, Improved Productivity Means Increased Profitability (Baltimore: American Journal of Small Business, 1983), Vol. 7, 1-3.

California. Major Goddard has been using various forms of the 360 evaluation models over the last twelve years.¹⁴ He confirms that this type of model offers alternative ways to observe and evaluate subordinates. For example, Major Goddard is able to observe the effectiveness of his subordinates because he can derive how much of the information, directives, discussion and pressure is filtered before it reaches the subordinates since he is privy to the majority of the aforementioned interactions. He values these skills and thinks that it shows that the evaluated employee is looking out for the best interests of his/her subordinates. Additionally, Major Goddard confirmed that immature and untrained evaluators can negatively impact the evaluation system and confirms that training and reinforcement is the key to a successful system. Major Goddards' input reinforces that educating and including all members of the leadership team increases readiness and effectiveness. When a 360° evaluation model is adopted and the leadership paradigm shift is made, the positive impact on the Marine Corps will be truly transformational.

¹⁴ Captain Rebecca Robison-Chandler, e-mail from Major Rick Goddard, January 22, 2005.

What are some of the immediate and long-term effects on the Marine Corps?

If elements of the 360° evaluation model are adopted, it would be necessary to educate the participants on the effects of their input. Once educated the participants will likely seek to participate in shaping and influencing the institution because they will realize their direct impact. For example, the EWS student experience would be more dynamic and interactive if academic changes were made as a result of student (subordinate) feedback during the current training cycle. Giving value and power to the subordinate pool would enhance the training experience, not deteriorate it. The same principle, regardless of the scenario, will manifest itself throughout the organization over time.

Long-term effects of these changes will ultimately result in the selection of the best officers and Marines for promotion and command screening. Those who are competitive, strong, ethical leaders will be selected under either system. Those who are not will be exposed to additional scrutiny from another evaluation angle before being put into positions of responsibility beyond their individual abilities or being slated

for command. Would Marines like Lieutenant Colonel A. Khan¹⁵ have made the same decisions if he had developed in an environment where his actions were open to evaluation by the Marines he led? If his decisions had been the same, the likelihood of his repetitive promotions and command slating would have been significantly reduced.

Why would 360° evaluation model fail?

A 360° evaluation model, or any alternative evaluation system, requires the Marine Corps to embrace evolutionary change. The inability to recognize the benefits of evolutionary changes, embraced by the aforementioned companies, is the reason Total Quality Leadership (TQL) failed in the Marine Corps. The institution will not accept systems that involve bottom up participation and criticism because it seems to be counterintuitive to the mores of the Marine Corps. The expectation of immediate response to orders is the foundation of these mores. Under a different evaluation model would a Marine disregard orders? The answer is no. Participative leadership strengthens bonds between leaders and their subordinates, galvanizing mutual trust and respect. When intense combat operations dictate unquestioning adherence

¹⁵ LtCol A. Khan was relieved of command in September 2004. He is being investigated for abusing his Marines.

to orders, the subordinate will comply. Perhaps the subordinate will take the order one step further and execute intent based on the command relationship and his/her loyalty to the institution.

The other major problem is that a significant amount of trust is required on the part of the subordinate to begin using a new evaluation system. The fear of retribution is a serious consideration. Two previous Amphibious Warfare students discussed this point in their 1993 contemporary issues paper on TQL. They asserted that long-term change is not possible if a fear of retribution exists.¹⁶ The same is true for a 360° evaluation model. Most Marines are competitive by nature and unwilling to give up power and/or authority once having attained it. Unless the current leaders are willing to take a calculated risk with regard to transformational change in leadership and the evaluation of leadership, much like the birth of amphibious operations or vertical envelopment, nothing will change and the potential gain from the change will never be realized.

¹⁶ Pierre C. Garant and Richard P. Flatau, Jr., Is the Marine Corps Prepared for Total Quality Leadership? (Quantico: Marine Corps Gazette, 1993), Vol. 77, Iss. 3, 16.

Conclusion

The potential gain from adopting a 360° evaluation model is worth both the risk and the fight against the opposition. With this new model the Marine Corps will gain in terms of increasing subordinate participation, developing stronger leaders/commanders, and reducing officer misconduct related to wrongful command influence or abuse. Having the courage to embrace participative leadership to strengthen the Marine Corps is visionary and truly transformational.

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